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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001330

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, S/CT  
NSC FOR E. MILLARD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07-30-13

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [CE](#) [NO](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: Tigers say report on plan to vacate base is false, but contacts see thaw in their hard-line stance

Refs: (A) FBIS Reston Va DTG 300259Z Jul 03

- (B) FBIS Reston Va DTG 300245Z Jul 03
- (C) SA/INS-Colombo 07-30-03 class e-mail sequence
- (D) Colombo 1325, and previous

(U) Classified by James F. Entwistle, Charge d'Affaires.  
Reasons 1.5 (b, d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: The Tigers have denied a press report that they plan to vacate a new forward base in the east. The monitors, who have ruled the base violates the ceasefire accord, say they no indication that the group is vacating the site; GoN facilitators are looking into the matter. Nonetheless, pro-Tiger MPs have told us that they think the group may vacate the site soon. While the Tigers are extremely unpredictable, we would be surprised if they pushed this matter much further.  
END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) DENIAL OF TV REPORT: The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Belam (LTTE) organization has flatly denied that it plans to vacate a forward base it has established near the town of Trincomalee in eastern Sri Lanka. (Note: For further details re the controversy over the base, which, confusingly, is variously referred to as the "Kinniya," "Wan Ela," "Manrasakulam," and "Kurankupanchan" camp -- see Ref D.) The denial, which was posted on "TamilNet," the pro-LTTE website on July 30, was in response to a news report carried late July 29 on the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC). (Note: The SLBC report was also carried by the DAILY NEWS, a major English-language newspaper, on July 30.) In the report, the SLBC said LTTE Political Chief S.P. Thamilchelvam had traveled to the Trincomalee area to discuss the issue with LTTE cadre after ordering the full dismantlement of the base within the next 72 hours. In its denial, TamilNet also quoted the LTTE's area commanders as stating that Thamilchelvam had not in fact visited the Trincomalee area on July 29. (Note: In a rare foray away from the LTTE-occupied Wanni region, Thamilchelvam has been visiting the Batticaloa area the past several days. It seems likely that he may stop in Trincomalee today, July 30, based on what we are hearing.)

3. (C) MONITORS CANNOT CONFIRM LTTE PLANS: For its part, the Norwegian-run Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), which recently ruled that the LTTE's base had been established in violation of the February 2002 ceasefire accord, said it had received no word from the group re its plans for the base. Kurt Spur, Acting Chief of the SLMM's Trincomalee office, told us that as of mid-day July 30 the LTTE base was still there and there were no signs of that it was being dismantled. In a conversation with poloff, Hagrup Haukland, the SLMM's Colombo-based Deputy Chief, said the monitors continue to try to "reach out" to the LTTE on the issue, but the group "is not reciprocating." As he has stated to the press on numerous occasions of late, Haukland went on to remark that the LTTE's failure to vacate the base promptly could lead the SLMM to "reconsider how it does business." When pressed by polchief re this seeming threat, Haukland replied that the SLMM had no plans to take any sort of drastic action over the issue, such as withdrawing from Sri Lanka.

4. (C) The Norwegian government facilitators are also looking into the situation. Norwegian Ambassador Hans Brattskar told the Charge that he could not confirm the SLBC report that the Tigers had decided to vacate the base. He said he would look into the veracity of the report (see Ref C).

5. (C) LTTE RELAXING STANCE?: On the other hand, two Tamil politicians with close links to the LTTE have told us that they have heard that the group may be reconsidering its stance on the base. Joseph Pararajahsingham and Gajan Ponnambalam, Tamil National Alliance (TNA) MPs, told us that they had heard that the LTTE planned to withdraw from the base in the next several days. Ponnambalam said the group was just

trying to "make a point" via its establishment of the base, not undermine the peace process. (Note: Suiting the opaque ways of the LTTE and its supporters, Ponnambalam was vague on what this "point" might be.) Pararajasingham said the group certainly did not want to provoke any sort of armed confrontation with the government over the issue. Polchief underscored to both TNA MPs that, in the interest of the peace process, it was absolutely vital that both parties fully honor the rulings of the SLMM.

16. (C) (((Note: Re the GSL's stance on this matter, there is no indication thus far that the government is planning any sort of military action meant to force the LTTE from the base. In public, the government has sought to downplay the situation, seemingly going to lengths not to ramp up the pressure on the LTTE. In private, however, the GSL has underlined that it wants the matter resolved as soon as possible -- see Ref C. End Note.)))

17. (C) COMMENT: While the Tigers are very, very unpredictable, we would be surprised if they pushed this matter much further. Based on our soundings, the group seems to be getting the message that its new base in the east has harmed its relationship with the SLMM and potentially courts some sort of armed confrontation with the GSL. If the Tigers do throw in their cards, it will fit into their tactical style of trying to push the envelope as far as it goes only to retreat in the face of resistance. All that said, the group's leadership is mercurial to say the least and, although the base has no apparent strategic value, it is possible the LTTE sees some sort of obscure symbolic value in holding it. END COMMENT.

ENTWISTLE